DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 533 CS 215 484

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TITLE Toward a Kiva for the Classroom.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 68p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; High Schools; Models; *Student Empowerment; *Teacher Role; *Urban Education; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS California (San Francisco Bay Area); Freire (Paulo); *Kiva; Student Led Activities

ABSTRACT

If students are treated like the fully human beings that they are and facilitate a process wherein they come to realize themselves as integral and empowered members of a living community, then no matter what is being taught, students will respond positively. A composition instructor serving at-risk urban youth in inner-urban Oakland and San Francisco (California) combines Paulo Freire's pedagogy to teach and empower, a "kiva" model for the classroom, and "an attitude." A kiva, in Native American society, is a circular holy place where the young are initiated by elders into the mysteries. The kiva is a way to structurally integrate the idea of community across culture and across time into the very form of the classroom itself. Students in various classes decided the direction the classes would take and created their own canons of primary and secondary sources. The instructor first used a kiva with high school age students to reinforce the autonomy, empowerment, and critical thinking achieved using Freirian pedagogy. The instructor also used the kiva model to teach composition and contemporary social issues during a 5-week summer session at the National Hispanic University. The kiva model was also used at the San Francisco Conservation Corps, a nationwide work-learn program for at-risk urban youth between the ages of 18 and 23. The students decided on the physical arrangement of the room, and that the reading list would incorporate shorter works of all kinds gathered by the students themselves. (Contains 19 references.) (RS)

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# TOWARD A KIVA FOR THE CLASSROOM

by

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# TOWARD A KIVA FOR THE CLASSROOM:
# NOTES TOWARD A NEOAUTOCHTHONOUS PEDAGOGY

## I. Sleeping with the Enemy

> The Enemy? We all know who the Enemy is. The Enemy speaks to us all the time--from the radio, on the television, on billboards, in the newspapers and slick magazines, in the halls of Congress, at the state capitol, in city hall.
>
> And the Enemy says, "Behold, how sleek and fat I have become. Am I not the wonder of the world? Am I not the richest and most powerful beast on earth? Would you turn against the thing which has enriched you, which has given you safety and security and comfort, which promises you still more wonders in the future--electronic toys, computerized thinking, a life air-conditioned from womb to grave. . .? And all this for so little, so very little--merely for the price of some of your independence, a little bit of your freedom, a little part of your manhood or womanhood, for only a little sacrifice of your humanity and honor" (258).
>
> --Edward Abbey

Coyote inspired this essay.

In Leslie Marmon Silko's beautiful and important novel Ceremony, Tayo, a young, mixed Pueblo and Anglo man who has been severely traumatized by the horror of war and the ubiquitous depredations of the destroyers (cf. Abbey above), seeks to re-

alize the dream of his uncle and mentor Josiah to maintain a half-wild breed of Mexican cattle on drought-stricken Pueblo land. The achievement of this dream is intricately connected to Tayo's own attempt to find and complete a ceremony which will deliver him from the psychic fragmentation and spiritual sickness consequent upon his experience under the Japanese as a prisoner of war. During a forced march, Tayo "prays against" the jungle rains for their complicity in the death of his wounded cousin Rocky, whom he had been carrying but had dropped in a flash flood. Tayo comes to believe--because "all things had become tied together like colts in single file when he and Josiah had taken them to the mountain"(6)--that his prayer is responsible for the drought in his native New Mexico. He is quite aware that there are precedents for this kind of judgment in Pueblo myth. Tayo also feels responsible for the death of Josiah, who appears to him in an "hallucination" in the place of an executed Japanese prisoner of war. His attempt to restore the scattered herd of cattle is a complex redemptive move to return water to the land as well as to replenish his scorched spirit--as there is also precedent for in the ancient rememberings. Silko expertly weaves the myths Tayo would have heard growing up into the primary narrative so that by the end of the novel the reader comes to realize that the spatio-temporal dislocations that Tayo suffers happen in part because everything in the world is indeed connected, "tangled up like the colored threads from old Grandma's wicker sewing basket"(6). As such

Tayo's sickness and redemption are unique in modern fiction because ultimately expressive of a Puebloan cosmology that is quite intact (to this day). That is, the world that the reader is initiated into in Ceremony is profoundly real and exists as such parallel to Mericano cosmologies originated in Europe. Much of Silko's genius lies in having coopted and extrapolated the European form of the novel to establish a continuum between autochthonous oral and written literature, to make Tayo's story happen just as it does, as an expression of the earliest native stories in modern form. Tayo's ceremony thus becomes accessible to both mindful Anglos as well as Native Americans. The novel becomes in the reading a ritual act of redemption. Many circles are closed. Many gifts are given.

Josiah is in every way a remarkable man who fully accepts Tayo as one of his own despite his "half-breed" status. He initiates him into the old ways. Rocky has been encouraged by his mother, Josiah's sister, to all but abandon traditional Pueblo culture and to embrace the conquerors: "Rocky understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world"(51). Early on in the story (though on some levels it is meaningless to assign anything other than a tenuous relative temporal order to events in the novel), while on a deer hunt, the tension generated by the cousins' diverging paths becomes apparent:

> They went to the deer. . .They knelt down
> and took pinches of cornmeal from Josiah's

> leather pouch. They sprinkled the corn-meal on the nose and fed the deer's spirit. They had to show their love and respect, their appreciation; otherwise the deer would be offended, and they would not come to die for them the following year. Rocky turned away from them. . .He was embarrassed at what they did (51-2).

But for Tayo, Josiah's ritual, the old way, is not merely proper but a precise deference to a powerful existential reality: "They said the deer gave itself to them because it loved them, and he could feel the love as the fading heart of the deer's body warmed his hands"(52). To disrespect the deer by foregoing the ritual is to create disharmony, to impugn the integrity of a functioning natural system of which the hunter is a part, and risk starvation. Just as to pray against the rain is to risk drought.

As Tayo comes to learn too well, there are forces in the world that make drought, spiritual and otherwise, an ever-present threat. Josiah understands this implicitly, and as an eminently practical man, decides to provide his family some insurance by investing in a drought-resistant herd of cattle owned by a man named Ulibarri, from Mexico:

> They would breed these cattle, special cattle, not the weak, soft Herefords that grew thin and died from eating thistle and burned-off cactus during the drought. . .These cattle were descendants of generations of desert cattle, born in dry sand and scrubby mesquite,

> where they hunted water the way desert antelope did (74).

(And one might add, the way Josiah's and Tayo's Anasazi ancestors hunted water in a southwest that was becoming progressively more arid.) Josiah:

> Cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something. . .When you turn them loose again, they go running all over. They are scared because the land is unfamiliar and they are lost. . . Scared animals die off easily (74).

But of course there is no one who is more afraid than Tayo. Crippled by trauma, guilt and fear, his attempt to complete his uncle's plan is an act of extraordinary courage and strength. By the end of the novel, Tayo is invited by the elders of the kiva to share the story of the completion of his ceremony. There Tayo discovers that he has become privy to information important to all the Pueblo. The drought ends and once again it is made clear that the ancient stories and old ways have proven wise guides.

*

In another important book, <u>Becoming Native to this Place</u>,

Wes Jackson outlines a plan to restore community to the lives of those of us who are at best only virtual natives of this place. Echoing Wendell Berry, Jackson challenges what he calls the "extractive economy" and industrial agriculture, and, following the example of plant breeder Albert Ahrens, commits himself to "developing elegant solutions predicated on the uniqueness of place "(49). As a foundation for the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas, Jackson's research is involved in taking what can be learned from intact, "sun-powered" prairie ecosystems and applying that knowledge to create a "community ecology in which human-directed arrangements are featured," one which circumvents the obvious failures of petrochemical-based agriculture, dependent as it is upon ancient fossil reserves, annual monocultures and pesticides, all of whose application creates disharmonies in native ecologies. For Jackson, the first step toward establishing genuine community in this place is to honor its natural order in an agriculture which mimics that order as far as is humanly possible. By doing so "we are more likely to employ undiscovered ecological principles, to take advantage of the natural integrities within the system"(50).

Here he quotes A. L. Hagedoorn, an animal geneticist who had an important influence on his work:

> The Hopis and Zunis of Arizona in the desert have one domestic animal and they have a special kind of maize, and both are specially adapted to life in the desert. The maize can be planted at a great depth in hills con-

> taining a number of plants with considerable distances between hills. The sheep are very small and hardy, adapted to desert conditions by their extremely small size. One sheep weighing one hundred pounds has only one head and one set of legs; two sheep, weighing a hundred pounds together, have two heads and two sets of legs, so that they can be in two different places to hunt the scanty herbs, and for this reason in the conditions where the sheep of fifty pounds can just live, a hundred-pound sheep must necessarily starve.
>
> It would not help the Hopis if "good" breeding-stock of bigger size were sent to Arizona and New Mexico to "improve" the local Indian sheep. Those three organisms, the sheep, the drought-resistant maize and the Indian agriculturists belong together in their symbiosis group in the desert (46-7)[Italics mine].

For Jackson, in order for a community to be successful in the land, economics, politics, education, and even the aesthetics of managed animals and plants themselves must be grounded in sound ecology; man himself must become mindfully indigenous.

> The problem was the books were written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with. When Tayo saw Ulibarri's cattle, he thought of the ideal beef cow which had been in the back of one

> of the books, and these cattle were everything that the ideal cow was not. They were tall and had long thin legs like deer; their heads were long and angular, with heavy bones across the eyes supporting wide sharp horns which curved out over the shoulders. Their eyes were big and wild.
>
> "I guess we will have to get along without these books," [Josiah] said. "We'll have to do things our own way. Maybe we'll even write our own book, Cattle Raising on Indian Land, or how to raise cattle that don't eat grass or drink water (75).

So do Josiah and Tayo, a remnant of a traumatized and persistently deracinated indigenous people of the American southwest, practice a principle of harmony identical to that which informs Jackson's community-based prairie husbandry.

And it is no easy matter in practice! Ulibarri's cattle are wild and fast as the deer they resemble, and they scatter at the first sight of a mounted man. They are tough and stubborn, no respecters of fences as they instinctively seek to return south (also the direction from which maize and the Puebloan kiva originally came). But Tayo uses his understanding of their wild nature to locate and control them, completing the ceremony and his own healing. It is a return to the community of the earth and its natural forces, of which the will of the cattle and his own will are, of course, expressions. Jackson:

> [Community is] a direct product of biology, consisting of countless elements, the roots of which reside in social organizations going back to the early humanoids and before (53).

One can only assume that a successful community in these terms would be one which not only took advantage of but itself <u>expressed</u> in subtle yet comprehensive ways "natural integrities within the system." Jackson's project is genuinely indigenous because it honors a principle of ecological harmony upheld by and embodied in the old ways as practiced by the Pueblo and other Native American peoples, and because it is involved in a return to native ecologies via mimicry, one of nature's most ancient and successful strategies (or ceremonies) for survival.

This principle--and what is left of the ecologies--has been bequeathed us from the Pleistocene and was preserved for us by our Native American elders. Any overlaying system which deliberately ignores or flouts it risks drought in one form or another. It is as simple as that. Jackson spends a good part of his book demonstrating that such a drought is already upon our agriculture and "communities."

They thought they didn't have to worry
about anything
They thought this magic
could give life to plants
and animals
They didn't know it was all just a trick. . .
"I've had enough of that,"

[our mother said]
"If they like that magic so much
let them live off it."

So she took
the plants and grass from them.
No baby animals were born.
She took the
rainclouds with her (Ceremony 46-9).

*

There is also a drought upon our education. Never mind the facile propaganda about the failure of the American education system from the Reagan, Bush and now the Clinton administrations, which serves largely as a pretext for commandeering new generations for the extractive economy. (Consider the urgent and convenient national reprioritizing of science and math education over the arts. Or take the outrageous nostalgia for the much-vaunted good old days of education. I was there for the good old days. This nostalgia is either a not so clever attempt at historical revisionism or else, perhaps worse, the expression of a rather ironic critical blindness, likely the product of an inferior education and denial. Never mind that noise.) We are not helping our students to find and develop an abiding sense of place. As for previous generations, the results will be disastrous for community. Modern education, instead of making provision to extricate itself from the extractive economy, is allowing itself to become more dependent everyday upon technology

which is in turn highly dependent upon an ever-dwindling finitude of natural resources. It follows that modern education is paradoxically engaged in many ways in destroying in its charges healthy remnant Paleolithic instincts toward community, which indeed has always been its function so long as it has been hostage to corporate America.

Take, for example, the uncritical rush toward and misguided investment in computerized classrooms, computer-mediated communication and televised "distance learning." The computer can be a powerful tool, but it is no less a luxury for being so. (As Gary Snyder warns: Hands that push buttons may hold great power, but they'll never learn what hands can do.) It is only by inequity, only by theft from and violence to the less fortunate and nature that such an extravagance can be maintained (in the inner-urban schools that I taught in on the west coast, it was difficult to provide students access to typewriters and even books, much less computers):

> Although Silicon Valley's industries are often thought of as clean because they lack industrial-era smokestacks and other such visible emblems of poisons, they are full of such high-tech toxins in the workplace and in storage tanks leaching underground into the water table. . .The clean rooms in which the poorly paid chip-makers were exposed to toxic chemicals are now subcontracted out in the Southwest, Oregon, and the Third World, so there's a little of the valley there. The waste that was

> leaching through the once fecund earth of Silicon Valley is leaching still, and more of it is leaching around the globe. Some of the chemicals used to clean the chips further have been peculiarly potent ozone-depleters. . .so think of the upper atmosphere too; and the landfill where the packing and shipping material went; and the electrical generating station you're plugged into and its energy sources--coal, hydropower, nuclear, geothermal, natural gas?--think of the networks it may be hooked up on; think of the corporations whose pockets it lined (Solnit 222, 232-3).

We have convinced ourselves that it is farsighted to encourage dependency upon screen technologies, but we have only acquiesced once again to the abstract exigencies of capital and corollary arguments from the high priesthood of economic "scientists," which practices what amounts to a kind of sorcery notorious for its ignorance and neglect of ecological, never mind deep ecological, principles. We have sold out to a destructive economy, dutifully fulfilling our function as unconscious consumers of very expensive, environmentally unsound and ultimately gratuitous technology. And so, following Josiah and Jackson, I must ask, where is the community here?

Granted, there are rare cases when a student is so terrified of writing that the promise of instantaneous, electronic editing encourages his/her work. There are those postmodern vacants who are incapable of responding to anything except the

seductive crepuscularity of a television or computer screen. We have discovered that CD-ROM and other computer technologies provide intriguing possibilities for "catching up" those who, for ideological and other reasons, have been short-changed by traditional education, or variously disenfranchised. But we do not maintain computers, or argue for their use, primarily for these unfortunates or even for genuine educational purposes. We encourage computer literacy and use because the skill is essential for those who would like to "get a job." But where are the jobs--especially now that welfare "reform" is a reality--and what kind of jobs are they?

In an interesting essay called, "Computers, Thinking and Schools in the 'New World Economic Order,'" Monty Neill adumbrates the odd connections between the development of cognitive science, the U.S. military and the rise of computers, and then critiques the National Center on Education and the Economy's <u>America's Choice</u> report (1990), which he says had an untoward influence on government/corporate efforts at education reform:

> Both conservatives and liberals argue that for the U.S. to "be number 1" in the world economy a more educated working class is needed, one that works harder <u>and</u> smarter. The claim is that then corporations will create jobs that utilize workers' skills. These high-skilled workers will be more productive than others and will therefore earn high wages. The alternative, they warn, is low skills and low wages. Schools

> must therefore educate "all" students to "world-class standards" so that the corporations will be competitive.
>
> The most obvious thing about this claim is that it presumes an uncontrollable and inevitable economy to which "we" must adapt. It demands that educators accept, not challenge--never mind construct--the economy.
>
> Yet two points about the emerging economy suggest that "we" should not accept it. First, continual lowering of wages is already fact and not likely to turn around; second, most new hires are not likely to be doing high-skill work. For U.S. workers, real wages have been declining nearly 1 percent per year for two decades, while the dispersion of the wage--the gap between high- and low-wage work--has simultaneously widened. . .the calculated intent of the capitalist system over the past twenty years to reduce working-class power and income around the globe has had substantial success (182).

Of course, very few are asking exactly how acquiescence to a ruthless, high-powered, ever-growing economy that commodifies human beings and wreaks havoc upon the integrity of natural systems constitutes a commitment to community.

I have seen firsthand the kind of work awaiting most of our students, should they be lucky enough to find it. For a number of years I worked as a text editor for publishing companies and law firms. My own contact with computers was limited

but I was usually in the position of checking the work of people who spent all day in front of a screen of one kind or another. Row upon row upon row of terminals. An incessant clicking and very little conversation, the unearthly glow of the screens, artificial lights overhead. Sterile, fast-paced monotony and a low hourly rate. Eight to ten hours a day was typical, of course, though many worked as much overtime as they possibly could and sold off their lunch hours to increase their earnings. Eye strain, back strain, carpal tunnel syndrome and high stress were commonplace. At one firm I was responsible for keeping an error ratio for each of the operators whose work I supervised. This was the number of misstrokes and other mistakes made per job order or specific volume of text generated. Quality control. Salary, promotions and raises depended in part upon a favorable error ratio, which was set arbitrarily low by management and about which everyone was anxious, including the editors. When increased volumes of work were shoved through the system, operators were expected to keep up and simultaneously to keep their error ratio low. When they could not keep up--usually as the day and week wore on--they were reprimanded. When they did keep up but committed errors they were also reprimanded. It was an impossible situation, made acutely so by surveillance from the editors, the office manager and the computer system itself. Keep in mind that in general these were decent, hard-working folks, as are most Americans, as are most of our students. (When the holidays came around, management managed to throw a Christmas party for the help, but separate

from the partners' and associates' party, of course.) Several of the other editors and I got together and sabotaged the system by means of an "error-hiding" counter-system (see Sabotage in the American Workplace, ed. by Martin Sprouse, SF: Pressure Drop, 1992). We did this at the risk of our own jobs. Eventually we got caught. Two of the senior editors quit. Like my friends who were chained to their terminals, I could ill afford to stop selling my labor and was lucky enough to be kept on, with a reprimand and triple the work. I'd like to say that this was a unique experience for me, but it seems that in the computer-dominated workplace the oppressive panopticon is the rule. It is very interesting how little emancipatory effect the grand new technologies have had. If anything, screen technologies make exploitation and surveillance easier than ever. The sweatshop is alive and well. Again, where is community?

Ah, but perhaps computers are made to bear too much responsibility here. I disagree. And so do some others.

> Artifacts are congealed ideology. The computer, as designed, embodies the command-control structure of a hierarchical society (Boal 12).

Somewhat simplified, the control structure stands as follows: The moneyed elite control the politicos who pander to the manipulated masses who, barely having enough time to feed and clothe their own (both mothers and fathers working to provide the rich with their cut) much less study the complex issues which face

them at the ballot box, are organized and consolidated into carefully underwritten entities charged ultimately with exercising physical control over nature for the profit of the moneyed elite. A neat little circle. In this structure computer technology is extended by the elites as a means to enhance control over the working class as well as to intensify the exploitation of nature, which has never insisted upon payment in any form for its bounty, its resources, its gifts (respect, yes--payment, no). Thus the ultimate source of the capital of the capitalist system--and this is nowhere truer than in the U.S.--is more efficiently raped, and with the forced consent of those who have the most to lose. Just as we can assume that a successful community would be one which expresses natural integrities, we can expect that an unsuccessful one would violate those integrities. Nerval: "When you gather to plan, the universe is not there. . ."

For example, I teach "at-risk" students. Now, "at-risk" is an embattled adjective, to be sure. Certainly our young people are in danger from illiteracy, gang violence, drugs whose use they have been improperly initiated into, disease--all those regrettably familiar evils that attach themselves to or, indeed, define a post-industrial society in decline (in drought). But as a colleague of mine once put it: "The greatest risk these kids face is being screwed." The other so-called risks constitute a symptomology of exploitation. The principles governing the creation and maintenance of environments like the ones our children are struggling to survive in, anti-communities, are

enunciated quite clearly by my teacher William Burroughs in his masterpiece Naked Lunch: "Never give anything away for nothing; Never give more than you have to give; Always take everything back if you possibly can." These are, of course, the principles governing monopoly capitalism. And so our students are exploited by the system and are themselves conveniently not informed that how much electricity or gasoline they use, for just an example, is a moral and ethical decision with serious consequences for themselves, Native Americans struggling to assert land rights, the nonhuman members of the community and future generations. They are not taught that they have the right to explore, to develop, to demand gentler technologies. Again, this is no accident. Their obedience, their place, is engineered and finally commanded by a highly stratified system that has a specific agenda. Neill again:

> Already some hints are emerging that extended replacement of in-person interaction by virtual interaction decreases a person's ability to socialize comfortably with other people in their physical presence. . .In inducing physical and social isolation, the computer is the extension of the "white man." Devoid of emotion, disconnected from the body. . . nonnurturing and unmusical, the type of the "white man" excludes all the human traits capitalism has attached to women and people of color (particularly Africans). I am not talking genetics but

> about the historical hierarchical division of labor that associates human qualities with the work one is forced to do and then calculatedly reproduces those qualities in people in order to force them to do the work. . .the application of computers to real-world problems will teach students how to solve problems on terms amenable to the controllers of the system and will sort out those who are most willing and able to do so. The "less able" will be funneled to less cognitively complex work to prepare them for lower skill jobs (or lack thereof), while the less willing will be driven out (190-1).

The arrogant imposition of the priorities of corporate America upon certain sacred obligations of the teacher, including helping students learn how to live gently and mindfully and find work that does no harm, and the lack of will on the part of educators--i.e., their coopting by the dominant culture of capitalism--to challenge that trespass are deadly serious problems. The situation can no longer simply be shrugged off as "business as usual." The stakes are higher than ever. What we are implicated in in education as it stands now is an insidious schizophrenic dynamic doomed to perpetuate the injustices that obtain in the larger society. In mainstream America, where corporate and corporate-influenced "cultures" hold great power, the pressures of competition, the abstract demands of capital and the heavy investment in highly stratified power structures and institutional self-perpetuation outweigh in almost every case

the needs of the individual and the natural systems which nurture the individual. There is no community: any and every individual and ecosystem is expendable. This sad diminishment of human and natural potential leaves corporate and other institutions constantly struggling with the problems created by low morale and high attrition. (Why should one expect bodies and minds which evolved during the Pleistocene to be amenable to life in prison, as slaves?) While these cultures are often materially wealthy, they are just as often spiritually bankrupt. Such profound spiritual poverty is completely unnecessary. It is only the investment of the power elite and their functionaries' ignorance and fear which maintain it. Including educators, whose job apparently is to infect the young with the ideology of the destroyers.

> "The destroyers: they work to see how much can be lost, how much can be forgotten. They destroy the feeling people have for each other."
>
> He took a deep breath; it hurt his chest. He thought of Josiah then, and Rocky.
>
> "Their highest ambition is to gut human beings while they are still breathing, to hold the heart still beating so the victim will never feel anything again. When they finish, you watch yourself from a distance and you can't even cry--not even for yourself."
>
> He recognized it then: the thick white skin that had enclosed him, silencing the sensations of living, the love as well as the

> grief. . .
>
> "They are all around now. Only destruction is capable of arousing a sensation, the remains of something alive in them; and each time they do it, the scar thickens, and they feel less and less, yet still hungering for more" (Ceremony 229-30).

Screen technologies, completely dependent upon the extractive economy and its maintenance of a highly naturally destructive power grid (consider the monstrous James Bay hydroelectric project(s) and the ongoing situation of the Cree and the caribou there, or the Butte Berkeley Pit copper mine, the nation's largest superfund site, for just two contributing examples), i.e., hierarchy manifest, are not finally of this place, despite their development and perfection here. Rather, like their productions, cyberspace and virtual reality, they are an unnatural projection of what was originally a Cartesian utopian fantasy; hence, they are literally "nowhere," literally the beachhead of "nowhere" in the bodies and the flesh and the soil of the natural world which is Turtle Island (a Native American name for this continent). Those who promote such technologies offer us better education, guaranteed economic growth, more jobs, a higher standard of living--ostensibly steps toward a rational, technological utopia. The problem is that utopia has no place here; it is a European fantasy. To replace what is actually here with the fantasy, everything that is native

must eventually be destroyed or utterly transformed. In fact, that is precisely what has been happening for the past 500 years. In this sense the application of screen technologies represents a contemporary form of Manifest Destiny. (The last time I looked, this doctrine had been historicized and thoroughly problematized.) It is an insane project in any case, for the epiphenomenal cannot exist without an intact, functioning phenomenal base, or, as Burroughs might have it, a planet and bodies to parasitize. As everyone knows, though, a body riddled with parasites can hardly be considered healthy. Of course, the thinking goes that there will always be another body (our healthy young students, e.g.), another ecosystem, another continent, another planet, another biosphe[illegible] to replace the one savaged. We need only move on. (As Timothy Leary once said, "The meek shall inherit the earth, the strong shall move on. . .") New technology will always solve whatever problems arise. But even if this were true, there is nowhere else to go! There never really has been! Utopia unmasked is nothing but the relationship between parasite and host. Utopia for the parasite, hell for the host. When Abbey called capitalism the ideology of the cancer cell he conjured an apt metaphor for the enlightenment of a people who, directly or indirectly, are dying at unprecedented rates--despite brilliant and often heroic technological intercession--from carcinogenic, mutagenic and ozone-depleting chemicals that they have released into the natural systems which support them. Dying from a wholesale destruction of community.

> The world of information and communication on line, much hailed as a technological advance, is also a social retreat accompanying a loss of the public and social space of the cities, the aesthetic, sensual and nonhuman space of the country, a privatization of physical space and a disembodiment of daily life. A central appeal of the new technologies is that their users will no longer have to leave home. . .This vision of disembodied anchorites connected to the world only by information and entertainment mediated by the entities that control its flow seems more nightmarish than idyllic. Presented as a solution to gridlock, crime on the streets, the chronic sense of time's scarcity, it seems instead a means to avoid addressing such problems, a form of acquiescence (Solnit 229).

I am not interested in going nowhere fast. I never have been. I am not interested in training my students to be unconscious slaves to a runaway technocracy. Like Josiah and Jackson, I want a sustainable community and a concomitant belonging to place. I want an education for all of us that facilitates that belonging. And I believe that the way to that education is to be found here, and has existed here, in fact, for tens if not hundreds of thousands of years. And so, like Josiah and Jackson, I have in my own way become a mimic of home-grown systems and processes.

What follows is lore not science. I proceed with respect

for the elders of this land, and especially the Pueblo. It is the land which makes everything possible. The Pueblo point out that we cannot become a people, we cannot become fully human, we cannot take advantage of the differences which now separate us, until we establish a workable relationship with the land. This is primary.

> The Emergence was an emergence into a precise cultural identity. . .the human beings could not have emerged without the aid of antelope and badger. The human beings depended upon the aid and charity of the animals. Only through interdependence could the human beings survive. . .Not until they could find a viable relationship to the terrain, the landscape they found themselves in, could they <u>emerge</u>. Only at the moment the requisite balance between human and <u>other</u> was realized could the Pueblo people become a culture (Silko, "Landscape..." 579).

## II. Making a Circle

> You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round (194).
>
> --Black Elk

Many hundreds of years before the Europeans made landfall on Turtle Island, the Anasazi illuminated the wilderness of the Four Corners region with the intense fire of their spirit. Their civilization was so advanced, so close to the land, that like other Native American cultures their language probably did not even have a word for wilderness. A deeply spiritual people, the Anasazi lived in beautiful adobe villages constructed like careful prayers and secreted away on vast mesas. The villages themselves were small, the largest only a few hundred people, and they were organized according to clans and religious societies ancient and intricate.

Each society had its kiva, a holy place where the young were initiated by elders into the mysteries. The kivas were subterranean, built beneath the communal plaza out front of the cliff dwellings where the people talked, ate, made love, and slept. The kivas were circular and low-roofed. They were heated by fires, and had an ingenious system of air circulation. One climbed down into them from the plaza via a wooden ladder. And it was inside the womb of this holy place that the young were taught about the sipapu, symbolic portal to the underworld [anthropologists are in

disagreement about alleged correspondences between Pueblo and Anasazi cultures], and brought as close to their origins as they ever would be this side of the death of the body.

I camped near the Anasazi ruins of Mesa Verde in January, 1992, amid blizzards and subzero weather, and had the opportunity to descend into one of the kivas at what is called Spruce Tree House. An unforgettable experience. The Anasazi are still alive; the fire of their spirit warms the land in the coldest of winters.

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"So, is that why we're sitting in a circle of chairs now? Because the kiva was a circle?"

"Like Black Elk says, everything that has power works in circles."

"So, what has power here?"

"We do. <u>You</u> do. Everyone here has the power to tell a story, share their ideas about something, ask a question. We're like a little village in this circle here."

"Everyone in the village had to remember a story?"

"That's right. And sometimes there were two or three versions of the same story floating around. This caused arguments, but more often it was a source of play for everyone. It was also a kind of insurance. If one person who knew the story died or disappeared, someone else knew the story."

"So that everybody could remember."

"That's right. Even if only one person in the circle survived, he or she could escape and start another circle of power."

"You'd have to smoke the whole village to stop the stories. Otherwise they would live."

"Do you remember Silko's story about two ancestors of hers who were smoked by Apaches? For almost 150 years the story was passed down from generation to generation. Silko's great, great granduncle and his brother-in-law were outfoxed by the Apaches' clever use of the landscape. The Apaches used a mesa to obscure their movements until they could get close enough to strike and steal the sheep. Can you see how remembering this story might be useful to the Pueblo?"

"Nobody would get surprised there again."

"Exactly."

"Good story. . ."

[The dialog here and following represents a composite of several Corps classes over two days.]

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So it was that we convened the first kiva at Fort Mason in San Francisco, in my Wednesday afternoon writing class. Around me, in the circle of power, was a brilliant assembly of men and women, African and Asian Americans, Chicanos/as, Native Americans, poor white trash, ex-cons, addicts, gangstas and would-be revolutionaries--all participants in a unique experiment at the San Francisco Conservation Corps. The Corps is a nationwide work-learn program for "at-risk" urban youth between the ages

of 18 and 23. The San Francisco chapter was the first, and it continues to be a model studied by other cities throughout the country. Our text was Leslie Marmon Silko's "Landscape, History and the Pueblo Imagination." The direct object was to extrapolate the plein air word sketching we had been practicing the previous week by accessing an extant, autochthonous cultural tradition that sees landscape, human beings and their cosmology as intimately bound up in one another. The indirect object was to persuade students, whose backgrounds often include severe physical and psychic trauma and whose everday existence involves negotiating the ruins of deracinated and marginalized cultures and the predatory disorientation of mainstream society, that developing a sense of place is empowering and, incidentally, integral to progressing as a serious thinker and writer. Our afternoon with each other at the center of the world was exciting and important.

For the past seven years I've been serving in inner-urban Oakland, San Francisco's Mission and rural upstate New York teaching America's underclass. What I've been trying to do is to explore and develop educational strategies appropriate to the overwhelming needs of those who have been ruthlessly disenfranchised but who are of remarkable potential: educational triage for those traumatized in capitalism's killing fields. What I've come up with is a revelation in an Anasazi kiva, a kiva model for the classroom, a respect for Native American dialecticalism, a dash of Freire, and, admittedly, an attitude. So far it's a

combination that seems to work.

The programs I've worked in have been good ones: Adirondack Community College's Survival Program, National Hispanic University's Upward Bound, The San Francisco Conservation Corps, U.C. Berkeley's Continuing Education Division, and Patten College's English Department. It was at Patten that I first discovered how to adapt Freirean pedagogy to the teaching of literature. (I had run into a dog-eared copy of Pedagogy of the Oppressed.) Patten College is a four-year, coeducational preseminary school located in a low-to-moderate income section of East Oakland. The students and the faculty represent many different faiths. As is the case with many of California's schools, attending "minorities"--including women--constitute in the aggregate a majority.

Freire's story is known by educators throughout the Americas. His is a home-grown pedagogy of resistance. It is, of course, critical not didactic, and this is the secret of its success. Freire holds that students are human beings; that is, they are subjects, not objects to be manipulated. It is the responsibility of the educator to create an environment wherein it is possible for all students--no matter what their background--to become full partners in the dialogical and dialectical (re)discovery of knowledge. Truth is not static. History is no mere collection of facts. Most importantly, teaching is not a matter of imparting knowledge; rather, it is a matter of letting knowledge happen (again).

What I saw, what I came to understand and experience, is

how close the environment this philosophy of education creates is to initiation, to what had to happen in the kiva in order for those who were being initiated to be fully competent to carry on the work of community. The remarkable resistance of the Pueblo and other Native American peoples over hundreds of years of oppression would require nothing less fully human. Compare the interactions between Tayo and the mixed Navajo and Mexican medicine man, Betonie:

> ". . .long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, if only in the aging of the yellow gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle's claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. . .things which don't shift and grow are dead things. . .don't be so quick to call something good or bad. There are balances and harmonies always shifting; always necessary to maintain. . .It is a matter of transitions, you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely. <u>You would do as much for the seedlings as they become plants in the field</u>" (<u>Ceremony</u> 126, 130) [Italics mine].

Adapting the idea of initiation to literary studies, it became clear to me that the new student, the latest receiver of literature and the canon, was of the utmost importance. At Patten (just across the Bay from Kiva Fort Mason, by the way),

I encouraged my charges to question why literature should be studied at all, and why particular books should be kept in the canon. I incorporated their suggestions regarding new books and ways to teach those books into the syllabus when appropriate. To read a book is to retell it, to perform it (as in a ceremony), to reaffirm or challenge its accuracy, its truth and relevancy, even its presence in the canon: to participate in the very making of literary history. Since these processes are the work and responsibility of those who undertake them, those engaged in discovery ought to be given as much opportunity to direct their praxis as possible, otherwise the development of authentic critical thinking will be impeded, replaced by paternalism and manipulation, the opposite of initiation. For after all, the stories do belong to everyone in the village, do they not?

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[At the Corps:]

"Some of you wrote about the sadness or distress that you felt as you word-sketched in your journals beautiful San Francisco Bay covered in a hazy smog and crisscrossed by bridges carrying thousands of cars. Where did that sadness come from?"

"It was hard to breathe."

"The place is wrecked."

"What do you mean, 'the place is wrecked'?"

"C'mon, Bill, it wasn't this way when the Indians were here. You know, I heard that the Spanish were the first Europeans to settle here, and that where we are right now has been a military base for over 200 years." [Some of the work crews had been clearing brush and debris away from the old stone walls that served as a perimeter for the Presidio during the 19th century. The Corps was contracted by the 6th Army to prepare the walls for restoration. One of the crew supervisors was trained in archeology at Yale.]

"I heard the Miwok Indians were here first."

"You're both right. And did you know that Fort Mason--where our kiva is right now--is one of the most successful examples of the conversion of a military base to peaceful purposes? And that how San Francisco converted Fort Mason is being studied by cities with military bases all over the country?

"Now, Silko mentions in her essay this thing called Cartesian dualism, a perspective that insists upon a split between the observer and that which is observed. In other words, the Europeans who came here saw things--nature, animals, even the Indians--in a very different way than those who were already living here. Their way of seeing the world was very different from the Pueblo perspective, for example. Silko's ancestors, and the Miwok, were intimately connected to the land; they did not see it as an object to be manipulated for their own ends. There are many thinkers today who believe that Cartesian dualism has led man--Western man--to pursue an exploitative stance toward the land which is finally

threatening the health of the whole planet. The smog over the Bay is just one example of that."

[While it is true that Native Americans "managed" the ecologies of Turtle Island, that management was of an entirely different order and degree than that practiced by the invading peoples from Europe. Naturally, it is important not to fall into the trap of romanticization. For some sober views of North American aboriginal political, economic and ecological endeavor, see the work of Christy Turner, David Wilcox, Tim Pauketat and Mark Raab.]

"People need those cars to get to work."

"I agree, but that smog you were feeling sad about is caused by a perspective that treats nature like an object. The Pueblo and the Miwok did not require cars to survive in this place. And they didn't have smog to make them sick or sad. How we see the world affects what the world becomes. How we see the land affects us."

"You're saying we reap what we sow. . ."

*

In my classes at Patten, group strategy meetings were held at the beginning of the study of each book or handout. In those meetings, the class decided, by referendum, what directions the study of the relevant work would take. The students were expected to have read the material by the day of the strategy meeting, and to have kept a journal of their responses. The journals

were instrumental in deciding which questions, reactions or ideas would be pursued (and which would develop into good papers). Volunteers presented themselves to cover the research needs, and the rest of the class time spent on the work in question involved discussion based on following up the leads. (For example, the class reading of Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year brought up questions about epidemiology, the socio-economic conditions in London in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Great Fire of London, the religious convictions of Defoe, the real identity of H.F., and comparisons between the plague of 1665, Old Testament calamities and the modern plague of AIDS. All these queries were subsequently answered by the students' sourcework and discussed. One of the students became curious about just how aware Defoe, as a five-year-old child, could have been of the plague he wrote so terrifyingly about. Before I knew it the student was trotting out Piaget's theory on child cognitive development. . .) A class secretary maintained a bibliography of the sources in case anyone wanted to write a paper on a particular work or topic. In this way the class decided its own direction and created its own canon of useful secondary and alternative primary sources. The students, making up a diverse ethnic group, provided a variety of cultural perspectives on the texts. Further, they were enabled to take action on the problem of canon formation, one of the most important tasks facing any living community. They acquired the power and the responsibility to articulate their own destiny in these matters.

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Consider the Pueblo practice of communal truth:

> The ancient Pueblo vision of the world was inclusive. The impulse was to leave nothing out. Pueblo oral tradition necessarily embraced all levels of human experience. Otherwise, the collective knowledge and beliefs comprising ancient Pueblo culture would have been incomplete. . . stories about the Creation and Emergence of human beings and animals into this World continue to be retold each year for four days and four nights during the winter solstice. The "humma-hah" stories related events from the time long ago when human beings were still able to communicate with animals and other living things. . . Communal storytelling was a self-correcting process in which listeners were encouraged to speak up if they noted an important fact or detail omitted. The people were happy to listen to two or three different versions of the same event or the same humma-hah story. Even conflicting versions of the incident were welcomed. . .Implicit in the Pueblo oral tradition was the awareness that loyalties, grudges, and kinship must always influence the narrator's choices as she emphasizes to listeners this is the way she has always heard the story told. The ancient Pueblo people sought a communal truth, not an absolute. For them this truth

> lived somewhere within the web of differing versions (Silko, "Landscape. . ." 576).

Note Silko's careful choice of words: the truth lives somewhere within a web of difference. And it is significant that in the Creation and Emergence stories, and in the other rememberings of the Pueblo storytellers, animals play key roles and often speak, both to each other and to human beings. This motif, or possibility, is common across Native American myth. To retell the stories, to carefully speak their happening, is to allow the non-human its voice and to practice what the Lakota refer to as All Relations, what the Haudenosaunee call Righteousness, or genuinely dialectical democracy. (Note that this communal truth extends across time. To retell is to establish relation with all previous kivas and with the mythic past--a kind of eternal present.) (See the productions of Thought Woman in Ceremony.)

And so, imagine a modern classroom, a New Native American kiva, where, for example, Native American creationists, Christian creationists and those who believe in evolution listen very carefully to each other's stories about how the world and the people in the world emerged, understanding full well that remembering and passing on their own versions of all the stories may one day be essential to our survival as a people. With such hard (and fun) work to do who would have the time to fight about who was right? Such fighting would miss the point entirely. As the Pueblo teach us, the stories are there to help us stay together.

Only a society as rich and spoiled as American society would ever forget that. Silko on the Hopi:

> The Hopi way cherishes the intangible: the riches realized from interaction and interrelationship with all beings above all else. Great abundances of material things, even food, the Hopi elders believe, tend to lure human attention away from what is most valuable and important. The views of the Hopi elders are not much different from those elders in all the Pueblos ("Landscape..." 561).

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Ideally, the structure and content of classes should be as one. At the start of the modern literature courses at Patten, we examined various texts which concern themselves with the subject of how texts and art are created and received and with the roles of the critic and author and their respective arenas of power. We learned that if a work does not receive adequate or positive critical attention, it is often forgotten, that is, it does not enter into the canon. We also learned that a critic with influence can resurrect forgotten or obscure writers and schools (consider Eliot and the Metaphysical poets). From this we induced that history and truth do not bear independent relationships to power. It is a short jump from there to the study of a book like the Autobiography of Malcolm X, where black history, which received short shrift from the powers that were (and

be), is put into new light by an important black leader. Content-wise, what we have here is the addition of a book (a perspective) which deviates from the mainstream and which, when put into a context defined by the above-mentioned power-truth dynamic, suggests that our society is, in fact, an interaction of diverse ethnic and cultural "entities" (including the non-human, e.g., the genocide-diminished bison nation. . .), all of which have the potential and right to explore, and as far as possible, control their own destinies. In order for this classroom process to involve genuine empowerment and empowerment-responsibility, I constantly reminded the students that <u>they</u> were the newest receivers of the canon, the latest critics; <u>they</u> had to decide, by virtue of their "presentness," what texts or truths history retained. <u>They</u> had to take responsibility for exercising power. <u>They</u> were entrusted, as they should have been, with the future. To perform a bit of misprision upon Foucault:

> . . .I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of [our students] as a historico-practical test of the limits that [they] may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by themselves upon themselves as free beings (47).

With our guidance. I would suggest that such testing (and such an ethos on the part of teachers and administrators) is essential to the initiation and development of the fully human being.

"I know what you mean. I know what it feels like, the disrespect when somebody treats you like an object, like you're less than a person."

"Does it feel like what we have here in the circle?"

"No. But sometimes you get you so frustrated you have to act out."

"I agree. But unless you do that intelligently, with full awareness of the consequences of your actions, you are giving your power to the person who is treating you like an object. You always have the ability to make that decision--about giving up your power. Whenever you are in a place like this, in the circle, at Fort Mason, at the center of the world as you are now, you have balance and power, and that is a very different feeling from what you get in an environment that is divisive: racist, sexist, fascist, objectifying, manipulative. No one in the kiva here today sees anyone else as an object. What we are realizing here is that it is possible for human beings to relate to one another in a constructive manner <u>if they change the way they see one another</u>. This is the power that comes from the circle, from the village, and it is a gift from the African American and Native American cultures. It is entirely appropriate to this <u>place</u>, and we could say, in fact, that it exists because of this place."

[Affirmative nods around the kiva.]

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The circle is symbolic of community across culture, across time. It makes use of the dynamic tension in difference to maintain connectedness. The kiva is a way to structurally integrate that idea of community into the very form of the classroom itself. At an interesting point in "Space, Knowledge and Power," Rabinow asks Foucault:

> Q. Do you see any particular architectural projects. . .as forces of liberation or resistance?
> M.F. . . .I do not think that there is anything that is functionally--by its very nature--absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice. So there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself. . .it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom. . .
> Q. Meaning that architecture in itself cannot resolve social problems?
> M.F. I think that it can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom (245-6).

To the Anasazi (and to the Mogollon, from whom the kiva passed from the south--as maize did earlier--to the progenitors of the Pueblo), the kiva was clearly more than architecture. It probably provided a space for cultural transmission, a space where socioreligious worship was practiced, a place where something like the communal truth that Leslie Marmon Silko refers to might have been discovered.

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In a wonderful interview in The Real Work, Gary Snyder says:

> . . .the professors in the English department are like kiva priests, priests of the kiva that we have to go to from time to time to say, "Now why was it that there are three lines painted at the top of this eagle feather, with a little bit of red fluff on it. Now what was the reason for doing that?" Somebody who keeps that in mind for us. . .their function is maybe to tell some young guy who's going to be a beautiful poet or a beautiful dancer, to give him that one little extra bit of information to deepen what he's doing. . .Because, you know, they carry the lore, they bear it (63-4).

They carry the lore; they bear it. And it is their responsibility to prepare the next generation to carry it. Just as it will one day be that generation's duty to inform the circle. And so on.

NHU's Upward Bound Program, like the Corps, is nationwide. It was one of the concessions wrested from the federal government during the classical period of civil rights struggle. It is designed to assure that students from traditionally under-represented groups can compete at the college level. Upward Bound provides intensive year-round tutoring, counseling and individualized instruction.

During one rigorous five-week summer semester within my second year with National Hispanic University, I used the kiva to teach composition and contemporary social issues courses to a group that in my mind comes closest to representing the true future of this place. There was K., African American, from the 'hood, highly intelligent, a high school baseball star trying desperately to reconcile the promises being made by college scouts with the demands of a life of the mind; Q. (he called himself Quest), the painfully insecure India(n) American, who through the help of the kiva, the larger Upward Bound village and his own doggedness, went on to shine in the Summer Games essay contest; J., born in Guatemala, quiet and tentative, determined to reach goals he was still in the process of establishing; A., Mexican American, a very shy and sensitive young woman, who planned to become an obstetric nurse so that she could do "the best to help [her] people"; F., an emotionally erratic, dyslexic and eminently likable African American woman whose learning curve shot off the chart during the course of the year. . .There was one class made up entirely of

Chinese ESL students. Patiently they tutored my tin ear in rudimentary Mandarin as I tried to turn them on to Richard Rodriguez, X, Maxine Hong Kingston, and the essay form. (They did much better than I did!)

The contemporary social issues course was designed to provide an introduction to cultural literacy, and we dealt with everything from homelessness, abortion, AIDs, drug abuse, education, the environment, to racism/xenophobia and the L.A. Rebellion. The writing exercises, progressing gradually through peer-reviewed draft work, involved plein air word sketching à la Kerouac, a sense of place essay, and an argumentative culminating experience that wrestled with the challenges of deep ecology. Since virtually all Upward Bounders live in a complex urban environment, their place writings in the kiva invariably dealt with contemporary social issues. . .

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Wendell Berry, who, along with writers like Gary Snyder, Wes Jackson, Annie Dillard, Peter Matthiessen, Bill McKibben and Barry Lopez, is helping to maintain a kind of visionary critical mass for our people, once wrote:

> One of my ambitions, perhaps my governing ambition [is] to belong fully to this place, to belong as the thrushes and the herons and the muskrats belong, to be altogether at home here. That is still my ambition. But now I have come to see that it proposes an enormous labor. It

> is a spiritual ambition, like goodness. The wild creatures belong to the place by nature, but as a man I can belong to it only by understanding and by virtue. It is an ambition I cannot hope to succeed in wholly, but I have come to believe that it is the most worthy of all (52).

It is my contention that all mature writers have this ambition. Flannery O'Connor had her version of it--she referred to it as having "manners." And I consider it my obligation as a teacher to help my students develop <u>their</u> manners. So I ask them to write place essays, essays in which they establish connections between inner and outer landscapes. I don't think that we can understand ourselves without acknowledging our relationship, or lack of relationship, with the land, with place. The Navajo have a ceremony devoted entirely to affirming such connections. It is called Beautyway. Barry Lopez writes:

> Among the Navajo and, as far as I know, many other native peoples, the land is thought to exhibit a sacred order. That order is the basis of ritual. The rituals themselves reveal the power in that order.
>
> I think of the Navajo for a specific reason. Among the various sung ceremonies of this people--Enemyway, Coyoteway, Red Antway, Uglyway--is one called Beautyway. In the Navajo view, the elements of one's interior life--one's psychological makeup

> and moral bearing--are subject to a persistent principle of disarray. Beautyway is, in part, a spiritual invocation of the order of the exterior universe, that irreducible, holy complexity that manifests itself as all things changing through time. . .The purpose of this invocation is to recreate in the individual who is the subject of the Beautyway ceremony that same order, to make the individual again a reflection of the myriad enduring relationships of the landscape.
>
> I believe story functions in a similar way. A story draws on relationships in the exterior landscape and projects them onto the interior landscape. The purpose of storytelling is to achieve harmony between the two landscapes, to use all the elements of story--syntax, mood, figures of speech--in a harmonious way to reproduce the harmony of the land in the individual's interior. Inherent in story is the power to reorder a state of psychological confusion through contact with the pervasive truth of those relationships we call "the land" (67-8).

In the place essay students use plein air word sketching, O'Connor's dictum of "three sensuous strokes to make an object real" and Kerouac's Theory of Spontaneous Prose to render places that are special to them in some way. I tell them simply "to tell the story of the place." They share their sketches and drafts in class and thus share their sense of specialness and

the path to it along with the places themselves. The essays are archived to establish continuity between the kivas in time and, obviously, place (in more ways than one, as I am now teaching in upstate New York and have the essays from the west coast to share with the students here).

Students respond in many different ways to this assignment. They don't just write about pretty scenery. Oh, some do, of course, but it never fails to impress me how many, in reaching to make their places accessible to their peers, manage to penetrate to that "place" where there is balance in connection, even when difficult issues such as pollution or drug abuse or homelessness happen to come up as "emanations" of the landscape. Many of the essays that I am receiving now in the North Country simply describe natural processes and the sensations and emotions that those processes evoke:

> I stand knee deep in the naturally filtered river with my legs numb. Now that I am part of their environment, the Fish are not afraid, but curious as to what the new object in their river is. I remain still and they circle around to take a closer look. They come even closer and taste my ankle. The sun comes out and shines on the water, blinding me from the sight that I was just in awe over. The cool breeze increases its bite and carries with it a pleasant smell. The beauty of the scent that I am noticing eases the discomfort of the cool breeze and

> cold water and awakens me. I am cold, wet, and half frozen, yet there is a smile on my face. Why? (Daley 1995).

But they don't just write about the woods. I have had excellent papers about city basketball courts (one of my survival students here had a very difficult time conceiving what a paragraph was until in this essay she discovered the spatial organization of a softball diamond as a structuring device--she was a high school softball star), that place you get to when your favorite band is playing, night dreams, making love (in which the lover's body becomes landscape), revelatory drug experiences. . .one young woman wrote about the inside of her head:

> Take a look inside my head and you will envision [my boyfriend's] face at 40. You may also witness my father's "rage-look" right before he bellows. You will see my dog before she died and behold my mother's smile. Take a whiff of what my head holds and you will smell my mother's closet where I used to sit as a little girl when I missed her. You can savor the spicy perfume I will wear at fifty, and you can smell the ocean as well as the 8-ball air freshener in my car. If you put your ear close to mine, you may catch the whine of my "anxiety voice," the one that makes me tremble. You will hear the bellow that follows my father's rage-look but also feel the warmth of my mother saying, "I love you." If you listen closely, you may even

> catch the sound of the last concert I
> will hear before I die. . .(Hunter 1995)

I have found that everyone has a special place. No one has ever failed this assignment. And some I simply refuse to grade. It would demean what they discovered. This kind of work is priceless. Caught up in a world of product, the bottom line, both in business and in education, we sometimes forget how precious our young people are, how important it is to make connections, how essential the land is. I cannot tell you how much their writing has enriched my life, how many new young members of the community I have gotten to know, how many new places I have found.

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Philosophy on Papers and Grading

Write me a story about your world and be honest. Do the best job you can and be honest about that. Don't get too hung up on grammar and punctuation and mechanics--that stuff is important but it is not as important as being honest. The world is full of excellent technicians who are dishonest whores. I will be honest with you about what I think of your story and your effort. Evaluate my story about your story. If you think that it is a good story, one which suggests ways that you might improve your own story, for instance, then set about improving

your story. If you believe mine is not a good story, then you must be honest with me about that. Perhaps I have missed something. If not, then we will discuss ways that you might improve how you tell your story. Improve your story and be honest about working at it. If you can do these things I will find every way that I can to pass you. I don't care what the rest of the world thinks about what we are doing. We have shared our worlds, and that is what successful writing is about. In the end I will have to put what is called a "grade" upon your gift, but if I had my way I would do away with grades altogether. This is not a test. This is how we show that we care about one another, and how the world stays together.

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"You know, Bill, before when I put something out for the crew to eat they'd all go for it at once--be selfish. But today I brought an orange, and in the circle everyone was different."

"What do you mean?"

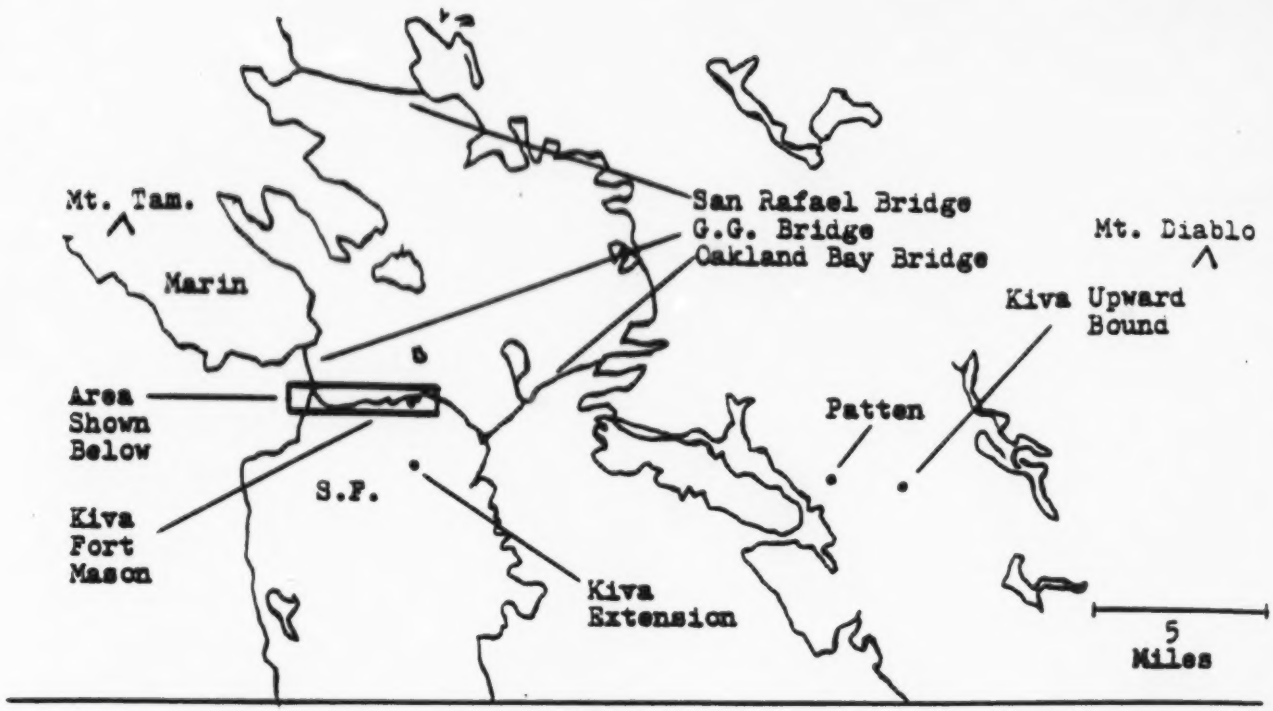
"They shared."

"So you think it makes a difference to sit in the circle?"

"Definitely. Everyone feels like part of the group. They act like it."

"More conscious of how they behave?"

"Yeah. . ."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Marin
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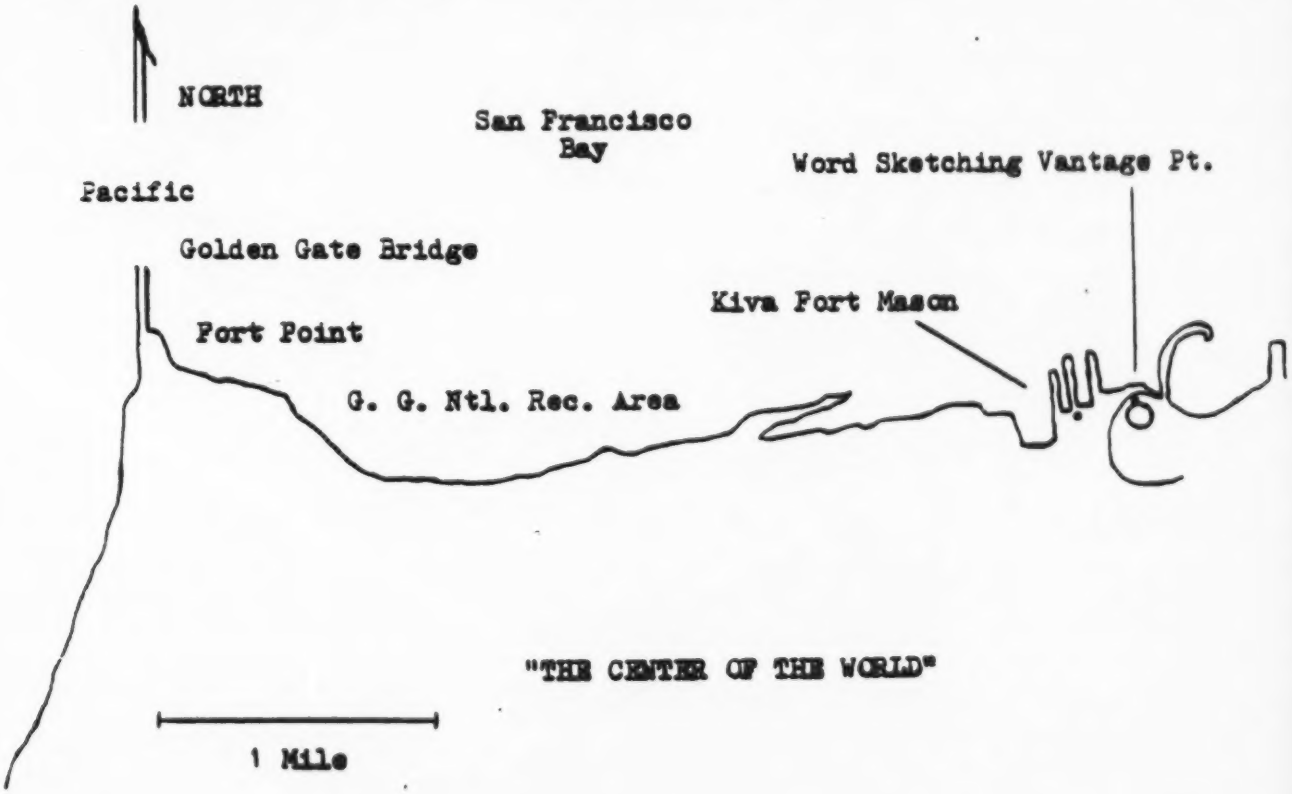
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San Francisco Bay
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Pacific
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Kiva Fort Mason
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G. G. Ntl. Rec. Area
"THE CENTER OF THE WORLD"
1 Mile

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I took the kiva on the road after the summer with Upward Bound, and the next place we settled was across the Bay, in a class of fifteen women at Berkeley's Extended Education facility in San Francisco. The course was Recent American Literature with a Multicultural Focus, and I taught it concurrent with my work at Fort Mason and the Corps. The books were House Made of Dawn (Momaday), Revolt of the Cockroach People (Acosta), Beloved (Mcrrison), The Woman Warrior (Kingston), The Middleman (Mukherjee), Factotum (Bukowski), Crossing Open Ground (Lopez), The Theory & Practice of Rivers (Harrison), and The Meeting, a teleplay about a fictional rendezvous between King and X.

Fifteen women, ranging in age from twenty to seventy, and covering everything ethnically and culturally from solidly middle class Jew to Yaqui Indian raised in housing projects: Fifteen women, one white male. I was intimidated. And I was exhilarated. As my ambitious list of course objectives read:

> To acquaint participants--all are both teachers and students--with some of the best recent American fiction, drama, poetry, essays and literary biography; to experience the diverse nature and deepening multicultural context of recent American literature; to analyze the pranky character of postmodern culture; and to place participants in the position of empowered, responsible arbiters of culture.

We began each class with a ritual reading from Momaday's magical "A Gathering of Shields"--in the presence of that strong California sun. Everyone in the circle was responsible for providing some piece of information on the authors/works being discussed, be it criticism, biography, or just honest feelings. Everyone in the kiva understood that we were claiming the books as our own, to consider in our own way(s). And the class realized that we were, in fact, deciding what would be passed on.

Acosta almost didn't make it. Revolt is a violent book whose unstable author-protagonist indulges in an almost shameless machismo as he comes to grips with his alienation and yearning for identity as a Chicano. Some of the kivans saw the work as misogynistic and completely irresponsible, especially given the recent unrest in L.A. Others, in particular a young Mexican American woman, argued that given Acosta's identity crisis and simultaneous responsibility as protégé of Chavez in the "Lost Angeles" of the early '70s, the book provides important documentation of one extraordinary individual's struggle to forge a Chicano self while protecting the life of the village. (There is an exquisitely moving passage in Revolt where Acosta, visiting Chavez during one of his hunger strikes, is brought to tears by a sign in a UFW chapel:

LA VIDA NO ES LA QUE VIVIMOS,
LA VIDA ES EL HONOR Y EL RECUERDO.
POR ESO MÁS VALE MORIR
CON EL PUEBLO VIVO,

Y NO VIVIR
CON EL PUEBLO MUERTO.

[Life is not as it seems,
Life is pride and personal history.
Thus it is better that one die
and that the people should live,
rather than one live
and the people die (47).])

Eventually, and after much discussion, even the most militant feminists and pacifists in the group acknowledged Acosta's destiny and the sovereignty of his and his people's vision. The book had to be passed on so that cockroaches everywhere might avoid being stepped on in the future. Objections were duly noted for posterity (let this paper stand as part of the record).

Now, Factotum is the story of Henry Chinaski's bid to keep his poor white trash head above the water in an America awash in world war. He floats from job to job, from woman to woman. Chinaski's swaggering, like that of the legendary Brown Buffalo's, was highly suspect to several women in the kiva. At first, the only class they found in Bukowski's persona was underclass. It so happened, however, that at that time California was being hammered by recession. Unemployment sat near ten percent (two out of every three jobs lost to the recession in the country were lost in California); there were some 40,000 homeless in the Bay area alone. The streets were full of cockroaches pushing shopping carts. (On Market Street there was a disturbing outlaw mural of a brightly dressed cowboy mounted on a rearing horse. He waved his ten-

gallon in the air exclaiming, "There's no place like homeless!") San Francisco's Civic Center and the United Nations Plaza were campgrounds for hundreds of Mexican and Asian immigrants, legal and illegal. The mayor instituted a controversial street sweep program which was backed by local business. The governor and other politicos promoted beefed up border patrols and harsh sanctions against illegals (eventually solidified into Proposition 187). Meanwhile, long and longer queues formed at soup kitchens. Dark-windowed limos glided with impunity past scenes of confrontation between riot police and radical groups like Food Not Bombs. Although I was conscious that my status as elder in the kiva was under constant scrutiny, I argued that these extreme conditions--conditions of war--warranted a hard look at the unorthodox morality and behavior of Mr. Chinaski, factotum. I argued to the village that the book had to be passed on, and for the most part I was successful.

At any rate, the kiva dynamic once again enabled a diverse group to entertain in a sophisticated communal fashion a wide array of perspectives, including Lopez and Harrison, who stood in in our circle for the non-human. We actively evaluated, appreciated and otherwise articulated a canon. We prepared ourselves to pass it on to the next circle of readers/re-writers.

And I, a mere white male in the smallest minority, lived to tell this story.

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"What was your impression of the kiva we made last Wednesday?" [Written responses from Kiva Fort Mason, the Corps:]

"Your beginning on the Anasazi was too long and boring. I just wanted to do it."

"The kiva is something powerful to me. I felt more open about myself and I saw the inner hidden fears of everyone else. Everyone can't handle power only because they fear what they don't understand. The kiva locks everybody's power together and flushes out the negative feelings."

"Although everyone was not totally into the kiva, it was quiet and forced people to pay attention. . .I can see the Apaches stalking the Pueblos on top of the mesa."

"I liked the energy of the circle, but I think that having a table would have worked better. If not, then it would be better just to sit down on the floor."

"I tripped on how many different ethnics we had. It was fun to hear everyone's opinions. I like classes that require class participation about everyday subjects."

"The reading was cool in a way, but it was too, too long. Perhaps if it was a short story or something like that."

"I was glad to see native thought penetrate into the class. But even though the audience/participants have a strong ethnic connection, being of African, Mexican, A. Indian descent, many have grown up in a culture that alienates individuals from one

another. The kiva worked as an introduction to the communal experience. It will, however, not elevate to its highest potential until everyone involved gives their full attention and trust. This will take time, I think, but not a lot."

"I felt the power and the spirit of Pueblo come around us and through me. I like it very much. I thought the reading had a part of the spirit of Silko."

"The kiva we experienced in class was wonderful. It got us to listen, to really listen and heed each other's words. I just think we should do it atop a plateau around a fire, passing a peace pipe."

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It was the next kiva meeting, and we decided by vote on a perimeter of tables with a circle of chairs inside. Fortunately we had a large room at Fort Mason, for there were some thirty people in that kiva. The arrangement enabled us to have tables ready for writing. As one clever kivan remarked, "If anybody wants to put his head down and go to sleep while we're discussing something important, they'll have to turn their rude-ass back to us." We also decided that we would incorporate shorter works of all kinds into our reading list, and that everyone would be responsible for clipping pieces.

At this point, the kiva well-defined and finally secure, Brother Bear, kivan of Cherokee descent, decided it was time to make a speech on the evils of racism and sexism; Brother Bear,

who hated to write but who proudly claimed ties to an "ancient, oral culture"; Brother Bear, who stood substantial at the center of the world, who danced for us and provided an axis for the rest of our turning together that beautiful October day.

At the conclusion of Black Elk Speaks, John Niehardt tells how Black Elk went up into the hills at the end of their time together. He describes how the great holy man stood under the sky and with tears in his eyes brought rain to the land. I am ashamed to admit that when I first read the classic I was skeptical of Niehardt's melodramatic ending. At that time I could not conceive of anything other than a coincidental congruence of the physical and spiritual planes.

Outside, distinctly visible through the rear window of Kiva Fort Mason, as the circle of power revolved that day, the mercurial autumn of Northern California conjured a rainbow that fell brilliant through the fog and into the Bay. I swear that this is true.

It was the center of the world.

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In response to a request from the Executive Director of the Corps for proposals regarding ways to reduce attrition among corpsmembers (see Appendix A), I suggested that the kiva model be extended beyond the classroom into the larger organization and also that the Corps become less dependent on corporate funding (see Appendices B, C and D). In May of 1994, at the behest

of the Education Manager, the kiva was introduced to the entire 110-member Corps at the Upper Fort Mason Community Room.

Most of the three-hour session was devoted to getting the model up and running. That day the circle of power enabled women, homosexuals, drug users, the disabled, the homeless, visiting aliens, welfare recipients, and representatives from the many other so-called minorities which compose the Corps to speak their mind not only about how they felt about a kiva structure but how they saw themselves fitting into it, if at all. (Translation was offered in Spanish and other languages.) The response was positive; there were those, however, who were skeptical and those who preferred to remain silent.

Creating a safe space is what the kiva is all about, and it was explained that if--for whatever reason--anyone felt uncomfortable talking in front of the larger group, being silent was a legitimate option. The group was told that listeners were as much a part of the kiva as speakers, that listeners had power, and that, ultimately, how each kivan participated in the council was entirely up to them. Part of becoming a fully human being is learning when and when not to speak and being sure to weigh all words carefully. The obvious was stated, that there are many and varied differences existing among those who work for the Corps and that one council was not going to convince everyone that we were all just one big happy family.

A safe space does not mean a conflict-free space. On the contrary, it means a space safe for conflict. And dissent. And attitude. There is nothing inherently inappropriate about anger

or attitude in the classroom. In fact, one of the saddest spectacles is the teacher who spends all of his or her time trying to kill the spirit of students and then complaining about their passivity. Anger exists for reasons, and much of the time for very good reasons: it is a classic response to trauma. Attitude is so often simply the wild within resisting conditioning by oppressive systems. Teachers who suppress this in their students are identified by students as the enemy. And they are. Attitude and anger are passion; they have power. They should be brought out, even encouraged, then guided, shaped, given direction. Several things must be communicated to the student: Cultivate your power, and know its limits; never turn it against yourself or your own (including the circle, the village); identify your real enemies; choose your battles carefully.

The most serious criticism given during the council was that it was fine and well to create a safe space in the Community Room but that once everyone stepped away from there we were all back in the "real world," that place being a very unstable and dangerous environment for corpsmembers. The only answer to that, the answer that I gave them, is that once we learn what a safe space looks like we can begin to make one in our hearts. Once we open our hearts we can carry the space within us and make another circle wherever we go. No one can tell another exactly how to go about doing that, for the mysterious process of working it out is not only a matter of knowledge and will but of destiny.

> He followed the wagon road to Laguna, going by memory and the edges of old ruts. The air was cool, and he could smell the dampness that came out with the stars. Old Betonie might explain it this way—Tayo didn't know for sure: there were transitions that had to be made in order to become whole again, in order to be the people our Mother would remember; transitions, like the boy walking in bear country being called back softly (Ceremony 169-70).

While our "great kiva" was for the most part successful, it was only a beginning, only an introduction to the possibilities of safe-space communication and power sharing. Virtually all of the power in the Corps is concentrated in the hands of those at the top of the hierarchy, and this is not likely to change. In order for the kiva model to reach its transformative potential within the organization, it will have to be embraced by those who hold real power. . .

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The Bay area classrooms that I was teaching in when I first developed the kiva classroom model and the sense of place essay were characterized by demographics very different from those which obtain in the classrooms that I am presently working in in upstate New York. In my survival classrooms in San Francisco

and Oakland, the ratio of Anglo students to those of color was 1 to 4 (or 5). In three years of teaching at Adirondack Community College (5 courses per semester, 100 students per semester), I have had only three non-Anglo students. This poses interesting problems for a classroom model originally designed to take advantage of difference. On the west coast I found myself refereeing exceedingly active classrooms where culture clashes were inevitable, colorful and often very loud. The kiva model proved effective in providing a safe space for all concerned (including the teacher), particularly when there were Native American students present, like Brother Bear. When it was pointed out that there are analogs for the kiva in the society of African and Mexican villages--similar initiatory processes--African American and Latino/a students demonstrated increased interest and cooperation. Hence the body of the students in these classrooms, the majority of minorities, discovered a positive spirit in interacting in the kiva, and this usually carried the rest. Students are much more passive here. There is an assumed shared culture--which isn't always true, of course--but one of the biggest problems is actually homogeneity, and the focus of the pedagogy shifts to finding ways to <u>introduce</u> difference as representative of a deepeningly multicultural American society. Now I find myself reminding my Anglo students that the people of African, Asian, Mexican and aboriginal descent who live in America are Americans too, and that their perspectives on what America actually is or ought to be often vary considerably from those of Anglos. This is something they are going to have

to come to terms with should they ever leave these relatively isolated hills, as many of them will. I find myself trying to represent these perspectives in the circle, usually via close reading of texts by nonmainstream authors, and this is tricky. I am lucky to have at least had my experiences in the west coast rainbow kivas to help me.

Of course, the students here have the great Adirondack reserve to draw on for their special place essays, and I have found that their work excels in finding relation between the human and non-human. Many of them are struggling to keep their families together in a depressed rural economy. The tension between the conservative politics in the region, the quick and easy answers offered by development schemes plugged into the destructive national and international economies, and the connection with the natural world they (re)discover in their special place essays is intriguing and often the subject of intense scrutiny and discussion in the circles. This is, I believe, a very good thing, something which is essential to community, especially here in the Adirondacks.

And I have begun asking those who take my Native American literature course to write papers in which they take something that they have learned from Native American culture and apply it to problems facing contemporary American society. . .

I don't know what I have accomplished in my seven years as a teacher. But I have learned that the circle--a human circle set upon a specific landscape--can be established anywhere there are people who are committed to finding community, as most of

our young people actually are. It does not have to be plugged in to anything to work. It does not have to cruise the information superhighway. Like Tayo's cattle, it is native and wild and does not look like the pictures in the President's or the Vice President's books. It is ancient and gentle and beautiful. It is human. It is the future.

The Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny says it well:

FIRST RULE

stones must form a circle first not a wall
open so that it may expand
to take in new grass and hills
tall pines and a river
expand as sun on weeds, an elm, robins;
the prime importance is to circle stones
where footsteps are erased by winds
assured old men and wolves sleep
where children play games
catch snowflakes if they wish;
words cannot be spoken first

as summer turns spring
caterpillars into butterflies
new stones will be found for the circle;
it will ripple out a pool
grown from the touch
of a water spider's wing;
words cannot be spoken first

that is the way to start
with stones forming a wide circle
marsh marigolds in bloom

hawks hunting mice
boys climbing hills
to sit under the sun to dream
of eagle wings and antelope;
words cannot be spoken first (68-9)

Let this work be my first stone.

William Weiss
Christmas, 1996
Glens Falls, NY

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